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ABSTRACT

This document provides guidelines for preparing evaluation programs for scholastic improvement. The philosophy underlying assessment and accountability is discussed, with specific reference to the positive and negative aspects of assessment. The design of a curriculum evaluation model is presented, including goal identification, data gathering, analysis, dissemination, and decision making. The audience for whom the evaluation is conducted and to whom it should be disseminated is discussed, and five goals for program evaluation are presented: front-end analysis; evaluability assessment; formative evaluation; program monitoring; and evaluation of an evaluation. The role of evaluation in curriculum improvement is discussed. Specific internal and external factors that may influence the curriculum are listed, as well as questions to highlight evaluation needs. The document concludes with a discussion of the characteristics of a sound and effective evaluation system. (BL)

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MEETING THE PEPSI CHALLENGE:
PREPARING EVALUATION PROGRAMS FOR SCHOLASTIC IMPROVEMENT

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PREPARING EVALUATION PROGRAMS FOR SCHOLASTIC IMPROVEMENT

(Meeting the P E P S I Challenge)

Educators have been overwhelmed in recent years by the idea of accountability. The philosophy underlying assessment and/or accountability is that in order to manage the best way possible you have to attend not only to what you do, but to what gets accomplished.

In response to various group concerns over the state of education, and what our schools are accomplishing, states across the country are asking parents, students, and educators to help in spelling out specific goals for the educational establishment--goals which define what students should know and be able to do as a result of their school experiences (Pierce, 1974). Regardless of how political assessment gets to be, there are some positive and negative aspects to it:

Positive aspects

- One very positive effect of assessment is that it encourages educational leaders/administrators to outline clearly the goals and objectives toward which they are striving.
- Another positive aspect is the wide-spread involvement it can stimulate among legislators, community leaders, parents, school-board members, and the educational establishment.

Negative Aspects

- A negative aspect may arise, however, if the intended use of the data is not clearly explained.

- Another negative aspect is the uncertainty in how data should be disseminated.

Perhaps one reason why effective curriculum management and evaluation is sometimes difficult, is that school district organizations do not state their missions in specific terms. The goals are usually stated in such educational jargon, that they end up being nebulous or "out of reach." These goals are then difficult to measure, since they are set apart from the process variables that interact with each other in the day-to-day operation of the schools.

School administrators in curriculum and guidance/evaluation must focus upon the processes that comprise their school system. You must decide what you (the collective you) want from your school district by clarifying goals and values, and then selecting the curriculum which fits the community and school district setting. Once this has been accomplished, the matter of evaluation becomes a natural on-going process. The selection of the evaluation device(s) becomes an easier task once the curriculum has been identified.

The next step is deciding who should be involved in:

- Gathering the data
- Disseminating the data
- Analyzing the data
- Interpreting the data
- Making recommendations affecting curriculum decisions

If the "collective you" have been involved in identifying and outlining the curriculum goals, and implementing and evaluating the curriculum programs,

then it will be easy to identify the audiences who need to have access to the evaluation data. In other words, who needs the results? Of necessity, these people should be:

- Classroom teachers
- Building principals
- District curriculum staff
- District evaluation staff

As yet, we have not begun to utilize the wealth of information the data could yield for these purposes. For example:

- Where are there increases or decreases in student performance over a period of time?
- Are children in our special or innovative programs progressing faster than children in regular programs?

All evaluation should relate to program improvement. Instructional programs that were satisfactory a few years ago may not work as well today, since students change; teachers change; local needs change. For point of reference, we need to define some common operational terms. The Evaluation Research Society (Lazarus, 1982) identifies the following five goals for program evaluation, in addition to the goal of assessing a program's impact:

- Front-End Analysis-Activities taking place prior to the initiation of a program to determine necessary levels of support or even whether to initiate the program at all.
- Evaluability Assessment-An analysis of the feasibility of conducting future evaluation activities such as an impact study.

- Formative Evaluation-Appraising the process of a program, particularly during a period of program development in order to improve its functioning.
- Program Monitoring-The periodic examination of programs that might focus on issues of program compliance or the collection of basic description data that might assist in program management.
- Evaluation of an Evaluation-This may take a variety of forms ranging from a professional critique of a report to reanalysis of original data, to the collection of new data.

Measurement goes hand in hand with instruction. Without measurement, there cannot be evaluation. Without evaluation, there cannot be feedback. Without feedback, there cannot be good knowledge of results. Without knowledge of results, there cannot be systematic improvement in learning.

Basically, accountability means that public schools must prove that students at various levels have met some reasonable standards set for their achievement. The concept further implies that schools must show that funds are being used wisely; that educational outcomes justify expenditures.

Evaluation to Improvement

The very economic base of our nation is evolving from an industrial to an information society. It is predicted that by 1990, more than half of the labor force will be employed in technical and white-collar fields. Because an upgrading of labor force skills is imminent, many educators are concerned about preparing our students for entrance into the employment

market. As new uses and markets for computer technology become apparent, employment will grow more substantially at the upper-skills level and least at the lower-skills level. Roy Forbes, Director of Assessment and Evaluation Division, Education Commission of the States in Denver, Colorado predicts (Lazarus, 1982) that the "basics" of tomorrow will be the skills that today are considered to be of a higher level.

How will our schools insure that educational programs are available to accommodate these changing needs? From time to time, it is a good idea to take a look at the total educational program to make certain that learning opportunities that will help meet the real needs of students of today and in the future are available to our youth.

External factors such as the labor market and economic conditions, social and demographic context of school systems, expectations and the role of the educational system, human and technical resources, financial resources and costs, energy, and organizational and legal constraints will continue to affect the schools and other professions over the next several years, However, many of the factors which influence learning are not controlled by teachers. This is particularly true for such factors as the background experiences of the student, his emotional and physical readiness for school, the cognitive and affective skills which he brings from his particular family milieu; and numerous other personal and school related factors. In view of the internal and external factors affecting student performance, a school district might ask these questions:

- Why are we here?
- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How are we going to get there?
- How will we know we got there?

A crucial aspect of a sound evaluation system is the careful identification of the purposes of both schooling and evaluation in a given community setting. To be adequate, an evaluation model presumes the existence of:

- A well-defined philosophy
- Clear-cut goals and objectives
- A specified curriculum model
- A systematic evaluation design, and
- Communication channels through which the results are made clear to school staff and the public

Following the identification of a community's expectations of its schools, the development of clear-cut goals and objectives, and the organization of a curriculum model, a systematic evaluation design must be organized. This design must be formative and summative, and provide information to assist in answering the following questions:

- What kind of data will provide us with the best picture of how well these goals are being met?
- What kinds of tests can best provide this information?

- How should test results be communicated to the public or to other groups that are demanding evidence that children are learning?

A key factor in determining the excellence of any school program is the quality of those who provide leadership at the local school level (Georgiades, 1978). The concept of the administrative staff as a school-management team is a basic factor in the implementation of an instructional program in any school district. There must be a close working relationship between the curriculum and the evaluation (guidance and testing) departments. There must be evidence that the evaluation results are being used to assist educational leaders in making decisions about curriculum changes. If meaningful programs relating to curriculum change are to occur, curriculum decisions must be made at multiple levels within a school system and involve large numbers of responsible people, including not only members of the school-management team, but also teachers, students, and community (Georgiades, 1978). No matter how well-prepared, well-written, or how thoroughly sequenced or packaged, a curriculum can never be considered apart from the persons who are its implementors.

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